DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 407 CS 014 157

AUTHOR	Dunn, Emma
TITLE	Appropriate Reading Assessment: Are We on the Right Track?
PUB DATE	2000-10-00
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Achievement Tests; Alternative Assessment; Elementary Education; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Skills; *Standardized Tests; *Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This paper asks whether the current form of assessment is appropriate in measuring the growth of American students in the subject of reading. First, the paper examines the argument for standardized testing of skills as an appropriate form of assessment. It then points out that the people in support of this form of testing argue that these tests are a non-biased tool for assessing all students, while opponents think that students in low income or poverty-stricken areas are at a disadvantage when taking these tests. The paper discusses opinions on both sides of the argument. It concludes that a more balanced approach to assessment could be as successful as a balanced approach to instruction, and that taking elements of both forms of assessment and using them for positive change would get educators out of their educational rut. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 448 407

Appropriate Reading Assessment: Are we on the right track?

Emma Dunn

Dominican University of California
School of Education
San Rafael, CA
October 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

E. Dunn

CS 014 157

Introduction:

For many years the public school system of the United States has been using standardized testing as their form of assessment in the subject of reading. This form of assessment can be useful for decisions associated with large, country wide educational decisions. Many will argue, however, that standardized tests should not be the only form of assessment used to place students in special education programs, retain them behind the rest of their class, or in deciding which classes they can take in the higher grades. These same people argue that a more balanced and authentic form of assessment should be used nation wide to decipher whether or not our students are growing in their reading skills. This paper will focus on the information given on each side of this debate in hopes of coming to some sort of conclusion regarding this immense problem that we now face.

Statement of the Problem:

There is certainly a problem regarding the assessment of American students at this time. The question that I have is, is the current form of assessment appropriate in measuring the growth of American students in the subject of reading? If not, how do we solve this problem that will in one way or another affect each and every one of us?

Literature Review:

First, I will examine the argument for the standardized testing of reading skills as an appropriate form of assessment. The people in support of this form of testing argue that these tests are a non-biased tool for assessing all students. The standardized tests are, in essence, supposed to be the most equal form of assessment. In fact, President Clinton is among the supporters and stated in his State of the Union address that every state should adopt high national standards and should test every fourth grader in reading

(Lehrer, 1). The opponents, however, think that students in low income or poverty stricken areas are at an unfair advantage when taking these tests. These students are often attending schools with little money and poorly trained teachers. Their skills are most likely going to be lower than those of a student attending an affluent school with teachers who have a master's degree. The students in lower income areas also frequently speak languages other than English as their primary language. The standardized tests are not given in their native languages and yet they are expected to perform as well as native English speakers.

The supporters of standardized testing criticize the other side for being "vague, indeterminate, and self-serving (Groff, pg 2)." Groff states, "It is my considered professional opinion that standardized reading tests in general are superior to teachers' judgments for determining precisely how well children in grades K-3 can read (Groff, pg 1)." There are clearly many different opinions regarding the proper form of assessment for reading. Now, I turn to the other side of the argument, authentic assessment.

> "Politically powerful advocates of "outcome based" education argue that high standards and a national system of testing will accomplish needed educational improvement. However, advocates of equity in educational excellence insist that the role of student assessment can be a constructive one only if it is defined within the context of an education restructuring process that includes standards for equity in educational resources and processes that determine students' "real life" opportunities to learn (NWREL, pg 1)."

This quote clearly states the goals of authentic assessment. They include having assessment that is directly connected to what the students are learning in the classroom

along with giving students equal access to all resources needed for a quality education. Another goal of authentic assessment is to have both teachers and students learn from the assessment that takes place. Supporters of authentic assessment saw the numbers being created by standardized tests and did not see them as useful in determining students' knowledge or how the teachers needed to help them learn.

Rather than using a multiple choice test to assess students, authentic assessment uses a variety of techniques to assess how students are learning how to read. Formal assessment still takes place but on an ongoing basis. Students are tested at least twice a year to see their growth over time. The information from these tests, administered at the district or school level, is used to determine if a student needs extra help and to what extent. Informal assessment techniques are also used. Activities such as journals, essays, reports, portfolios, and discussion groups are all a part of this informal assessment. This is the work that the students are working on regularly. Their knowledge is built on rather than memorized and forgotten. Supporters of authentic assessment think that using a variety of assessment tools is more realistic. Students all learn differently and should be allowed to show their strengths in different forms of assessment. The International Reading Association states in their position statement, "To be opposed to large-scale, high-stakes testing is not to be opposed to assessment or accountability. It is to affirm the necessity of aligning our purposes and goals with our methods (IRA, pg.7)."

Summary

It is clear that the debate over reading assessment will not be over soon. As with any debate, both sides of the issue are passionate about their feelings and thoughts. On the side of standardized tests you have those who feel every student in the United States should be accountable for the same knowledge base. On the side of authentic assessment you have those who feel a more custom assessment should take place within districts or schools. The one thing that we do know is that our students need to be assessed in some way so that we can ensure their success as adults by giving them an appropriate education.

Implications

As a new teacher, it is hard for me to take a firm stand on this issue. However, it seems to me that a more balanced approach to assessment could be a successful as a balanced approach to instruction. Perhaps if we take elements of both forms of assessment and use them for a positive change we would get out of our educational rut. In real life there is hardly ever one way of doing things. We collaborate and give and take so that everyone succeeds. In my opinion, this is where we need to take reading assessment. Use the authentic assessment in the classroom and align it with the national standards so that when the students inevitably have to take a standardized test they are prepared for it. Whatever our nation decides to do in regards to assessing our students, it should never get in the way of good teaching. All too often I hear of teachers who sacrifice techniques that work just to prepare their students for a standardized test. This is awful and should never occur. We cannot loose sight of the true reason we are

debating this issue, the well being of our youth. This is not a battle of political campaigns or points, it is a battle to improve our children's education and we can never forget that.

References

Groff, Dr. Patrick. Reading Assessment: Teachers' Opinions Versus Standardized Tests. The National Right to Read Foundation. Retrieved October 5,2000, from the World Wide Web: http://nrrf.org/essay_opinions_vs_tests.htm

Gunning, Thomas G. (2000). Creating Literacy Instruction for All Children. 485-519.

High Stakes Assessments in Reading: A position statement of the International Reading Association. (August 1999). International Reading Association. Retrieved September 20,2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.reading.org/advocacy/policies/high-stakes.pdf

Lehrer, Jim. Setting the Standard (Newshour Transcript). (September 8,1997). Public Broadcasting System. Retrieved October 5,2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/july-dec97/test_9-8a.html

Powell, Janet L. How Well Do Tests Measure Real Reading? ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Digest #41. Retrieved September 25, 2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/digests/d41.html

Student Assessment and Testing. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved September 20,2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nwrel.org/cnorse/booklets/educate/11.html

Valencia, Sheila W. Understanding Authentic Classroom-Based Literacy Assessment. (1997). Houghton Mifflin Company. Retrieved September 27, 2000, from the World Wide Web: http:// www.eduplace.com/rdg/res/litass/intro.html